

## Asleep At The Wheel

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Eight hours of sleep isn't a luxury we're all afforded. Sleep was hard to come by when I was stationed in Fluda, Germany, and it wasn't uncommon for me to go up to three days without it. Every fourth day I was comatose, but it was a routine I'd grown accustomed to. Unfortunately, sleep isn't one of those basic needs your body can do without for long. I eventually found out you've got to pay your sleep debt.

The ink wasn't dry on my promotion orders to sergeant when the executive officer of my troop tasked me to relieve the sergeant of the guard at squadron headquarters. Although I was in day three of my sleepless sequence and still suffering from jetlag from my flight to Europe, I dismounted the aircraft I was working on and reported to the squadron. I didn't give my lack of rest a second thought. I just wanted to do a good job and impress my chain of command.

After a briefing from the command sergeant major, I logged in and dispatched a vehicle from the motor pool so I could check on the guards. I ensured everything was in order, went back to the squadron, and the rest of the day passed without incident. About 3 a.m., I began another check of the guards, but by that time I was extremely tired and having trouble even keeping my eyes open.

Determined to finish the job, I climbed into the vehicle and began to back up. In my exhausted state, however, I failed to notice the privately owned vehicle that was parked behind me and backed right into it. Now fully awake, I dismounted and inspected my vehicle. There was no damage to it, but the POV's bumper was dented. I'd also managed to knock out its front lights and damage the grill. The owner of the POV, an aviator assigned to the unit, heard the sound of crashing metal and ran outside. I took a sound tongue lashing from the guy and later paid his \$500 insurance deductible.

I should've done things differently that night, but I didn't because I was too nervous to speak up and too eager to do a good job. I should've told my XO I wasn't in any condition to drive. I also should've spoken up while the command sergeant major was briefing me, but I didn't for the same reasons.

Soldiers today aren't any different than I was then. I was lucky because my accident just hurt me in the wallet. As leaders, we must be aware of what our Soldiers are doing and talk with them to gain some insight into their lives and what they're going through. Our intervention might keep them from making a mistake that could cost them their lives.